

Metro Aids Workers' Parking

By Jack Eisen

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The Metro transit agency, operator of the area's bus system and builder of the future subway, has agreed to subsidize automobile parking for 125 employees who work at its headquarters and have free passes to ride to work by bus.

Jackson Graham, Metro general manager, approved the subsidy—up to \$10 a month starting Sept. 1—in an unannounced memorandum sent May 10 to the president of the transit agency's employee organization. A copy of the memo was obtained by The Washington Post.

Graham confirmed and defended his decision yesterday, saying it was sparked by a forthcoming sharp increase in monthly parking rates in the basement of L'Enfant Plaza in Southwest Washington, where Metro now has its headquarters.

Metro's decision to subsidize car parking comes at a time when the agency itself is promoting increased public use of the bus lines it acquired from the previous private owners early this year, and when public policy is aimed increasingly at discouraging auto parking in the congested central city.

The 125 subsidized Metro employees, about one-third of the agency's headquarters staff, occupy spaces that now cost \$23.25 to \$32 a month, according to G. Richard Raville, Metro management services director.

Under a new lease, these rates will range from \$40 to \$50, an increase of about \$18, starting Sept. 1. Of this cost rise, Graham agreed that Metro will pay up to \$10.

Raville estimated the total cost to Metro at between \$5,300 and \$7,000 between Sept. 1 and next March, when the agency is scheduled to move into its own new building at 6th and G Streets NW.

Both Raville and Graham said the number of parking spaces will be sharply curtailed at the new headquarters, and that employees assigned those spaces will be charged the same \$30 to \$40 they will pay in the meantime at L'Enfant Plaza. There will be no cash subsidy at the new headquarters.

Edwin A. Palmer, a Metro engineer and president of the agency's Employees for Progress Organization, protested

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the L'Enfant Plaza parking increases in a memo to Graham on April 11.

Graham said he and other top Metro officials agonized over the situation for nearly a month before responding.

Graham said he was aware of the seeming anomaly of a public transit agency subsidizing the use of cars. But, he said, the question was one of maintaining employee morale, since it takes a typical commuter about twice as long to get to work by bus as by car. Existing public transportation, he said, "won't serve most of our people."

Moreover, he said, many employees use their cars regularly on Metro business. He noted that about 30 of them needed cars last night to attend a public hearing in Alexandria and to get home afterward.

Although improved service into Southwest Washington has resulted in a gradual increase of bus commuting by Metro employees, Graham said there was no significant rise when all employees were granted free bus passes after the agency took over the bus lines.

Graham said he has the power to make the decision on a parking subsidy without consulting the Metro board of directors. The directors get free parking when they attend weekly board meetings at L'Enfant Plaza.

This has been seen by the front office 5/2/92